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RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 3631
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 3490
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 4171
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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
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RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 001528

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TAGS: [SCUL](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: GOVERNMENT CENSORS ARTISTS TO "ENHANCE" THE IMAGE
OF TURKMENISTAN

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Sylvia Reed Curran, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Poloff recently spoke with a graphic artist about his current project illustrating a new edition of poetry by the classical Turkmen poet Mollanepes. The artist graduated from Moscow's prestigious Poligraphic Institute during the Soviet era, and his work has been the subject of numerous awards and exhibitions. He also designed the first Turkmen banknotes following independence. The Mollanepes project was organized by the Ministry of Culture, with the Minister himself involved in approving the details. The publication date was initially intended to coincide with Independence Day events in October and the artist devoted himself entirely to the project in August in order to complete the illustrations on time. The illustrations were in color, although much of the artist's best work is done in black and white, and he is most comfortable in that medium. He explained that the Ministry would never accept black and white illustrations, without further explanation. Following submission of the drawings, the artist heard nothing more from the Ministry, and the Independence holiday passed without publication. He was recently provided with a proof copy of the book, which included his illustrations. He was told, however, that his depiction of women, dressed in traditional Turkmen clothing and in various standing or reclining poses appropriate to the texts, needed to be changed. The women needed to be shown with arms gracefully uplifted in the manner of traditional Turkmen dances.

¶2. (C) The artist intended to make the requested revisions to his illustrations, but had not begun because of uncertainty about how the project would proceed. He recently heard that the Ministry announced an artists' competition to submit illustrations for the Mollanepes' poems. Submissions are due by mid-December. He also heard that the Ministry decided to change the format and design of the book, after someone had seen some recent impressive Russian and Iranian publications. The artist commented that there is no consistency when working on such projects for the government, and that decision-makers readily change their minds on a whim at the last minute. He also subtly expressed scorn that individuals with no artistic training or background were making decisions about the artistic merits of work produced by Turkmen artists.

13. (C) A prominent Turkmen writer recounted a similar recent experience regarding the publication of a short story in a government-run magazine. This writer is a member of the older generation among Turkmen writers and was widely published during the Soviet era. The plot of the story involved a rural Turkmen elder's reaction to a news report predicting that a meteor would crash into Earth in 2012. The word "black," in the title "The Black Stone," was objected to by an editor, who substituted "mysterious." The opening scene in the story was also sent back for revision. In the scene, a woman in a hurry, waiting for a bus that was late, looked at her watch. This gesture was a cue for one of the constantly roving private taxis to stop and offer a ride. This meeting between the woman and the taxi driver was integral to the plot. The editor objected to the suggestion that the bus was running late as a negative portrayal of life in Turkmenistan. The writer was still considering how to make the requested revision and maintain an authentic plot.

14. (C) COMMENT: Government censorship of all forms of artistic creativity is prevalent in Turkmenistan, as these two stories show. It goes beyond political and nationalistic ideology to include the preferences and whims of the leadership, as understood by their subordinates. Many older artists, who receive a pension and do not rely on government projects for income, still create art according to their own standards, although only a small circle of friends and acquaintances ever see it because it won't be approved for public exhibition. Most younger artists, who need government-funded projects to make ends meet, have little

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choice but to make art that conforms to government standards, at the expense of personal expression, creativity and experimentation. END COMMENT.
CURRAN